

Memorandum to Mikhail Gorbachev “The Priority of Political Development,” December 25, 1985 [Excerpt]

3. Division of functions between different parts of the administrative system will force one branch to push another ahead. In particular, we need a change in the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches, between the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers, and between the corresponding lower structures. Currently, the first one is crushed by the second. The legislative organs only discuss [problems], and the executive organs make practical decisions (precisely--they make decisions, and not just implement those).

Maybe a permanently acting parliamentary apparatus (not necessarily a permanent general session) would change the interaction of branches somewhat. Decisions by the legislative body should be binding. Votes of confidence. We need a decisive strengthening of accountability on the part of the executive branch before the legislative.

To change the practice of discussions, which now have the character of reports. They are needed, but they should have a problem-driven character. Parliamentary commissions should be created on new issues emerging before the country. A working parliament, which is involved in the daily life of the country, and not just formally considering two or three issues: the plan, the budget, and the international situation.

To define the rights of the Deputies of the USSR Supreme Soviet and other Deputies, especially local ones. In particular, there could be the right of direct involvement with the determination of a timetable for the reaction of the relevant organs of authority.

Elections should be not just a selection but a choice and, importantly, a choice among the best. The number of proposed candidates could be limited (but no fewer than two). The party should control the nomination, but not impose a strict regulation, about which everybody has been talking aloud for a long time: an “allotment” (so many women, so many nonaffiliated, so many from the sphere of manual labor, and so on).

A deputy should be dependent on the voters, and should genuinely express their opinions through himself, and not his opinion on their behalf. “We can rule only when we correctly express what people think.” (Lenin)

Accountability and turnover of deputies. Genuine recall of the deputies – publicly and with explanations. “A fuller democracy due to less formality and greater ease of election and recall.” (Lenin)

Consequences: a colossal increase in real responsibility for the masses, subordination and accountability before them and, mainly, a genuine engagement of the masses in the management of the affairs of the region, oblast, republic, and country through their direct and organized collective influence on the Deputy. It would be seen

most effectively first of all in the transformation of local Soviets into genuine organs of power.

4. All-around glasnost: “The state is only strong when the masses know everything, and make judgments about everything, and take action consciously.” (Lenin). Glasnost, thorough and timely information, is an unavoidable condition of the further democratization of public life. Only an informed person is capable of participating in the affairs of society fruitfully and with initiative. To appeal to the civic energy of the people, who did not possess extensive information, and who do not find themselves in a social climate favorable to such creative activity would be senseless.

In the same connection, one comment on ideological work. The reasons for the serious lowering of effectiveness of the educational process go beyond the framework of ideological work itself.

Until today, the main basic principle of ideological activity continues to be a mistaken one. We continue to consider propaganda, i.e. the products of our consciousness: a book, a lecture, a play, a film, a report, a session, a political network and so on, to be the decisive condition for forming socialist consciousness. It is possible that it was extremely important at a time when the party was not the ruling party. But it is not the consciousness of a propaganda official, writer, and so on, that forms the consciousness of the public, when the power belongs to the public. [Consciousness] is formed by public existence in the process of political actions, the political movement of the masses themselves. There are many concrete statements by V.I. Lenin to this effect, emphasizing that it “is not some kind of studying or books, etc.,” nor speeches and rallies, but “political actions, “participation in the daily struggle of life” and “the direct political experience of the masses” – this is what represents the defining, decisive, main condition for communist education of the public, and for forming its socialist consciousness. And this is a sphere not of ideology, but of democracy – Soviet, socialist democracy.

5. Genuine independence of judicial power from all other powers. A dangerous opinion has been formed that there is no justice in this country. And by the way this is one of the most transparent forms of power.

Judicial independence, real guaranties of independence [are contained] in the principles of the judicial system, the procedural recall, and so on.

Independence of a judge, recall only under defined conditions. In our country [judges are elected] for 5 years. The closer the date of the elections, the weaker the principles. It is not an accident that judges constantly move around. [We should] increase the term at least to 10 years, to stabilize a judge’s situation. Legal activity should be a profession.

Today there are more than enough people who want to interfere in carrying out justice. We should consider such interference in deciding concrete cases a crime punishable under the law.

The criminal code should be firm and stable. Mandatory and harsh punishments for anti-social elements, especially for thieves, mercilessness – for killers.

At the same time real guarantees for the individual practicing his rights. There should be a law on individual rights and their guarantees, a law on personal integrity, personal property and domicile, on privacy of correspondence, telephone conversations and personal life.

[There should be] organizational forms of practicing the right to hold rallies, freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly, and the right to free travel.

We want everybody to have great civic responsibilities, but that is only possible if there are great civil rights.

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Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive.]